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Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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---------- 101096
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FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5613
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY RANGOON
AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMCONSUL UDORN
USLO PEKING

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 6244

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, LA, UR, CH
SUBJECT: SOVIETS IN LAOS

REF: A) STATE 265095
B) MOSCOW 15406

1. THE DEPARTMENT HAS ASKED SOME INTERESTING QUESTIONS REGARDING THE RUSSIAN PRESENCE IN LAOS. UNFORTUNATELY, WE HAVE VERY FEW ANSWERS. THE "NEW REALITIES" MAKE IT DIFFICULT FOR US TO HAVE ANY BUT THE SKETCHIEST IDEA AS TO WHAT IS GOING ON IN THE PROVINCES OR EVEN WHAT OUR CHINESE AND RUSSIAN COLLEAGUES ARE UP TO IN VIENTIANE. WE ARE, HOWEVER, AWARE OF THE DEPARTMENT'S INTEREST AND HAVE DONE AND WILL DO WHAT REPORTING WE CAN WHEN INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE.

2. FOLLOWING ARE OUR COMMENTS ON THE QUESTIONS POSED IN PARA 2 OF REF A. ANSWERS ARE KEYED TO QUESTIONS.
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A. THE SOVIETS HERE APPEAR TO BE ENGAGED IN ECONO-
MIC ASSISTANCE ACTIVITY IN ADDITION TO PROVIDING AIR
SERVICES. WE ARE NOT ABLE TO ESTIMATE HOW MANY OF THEM
ARE ENGAGED IN ESPIONAGE, OR ON WHOM THEY ARE TARGETED.

B. YES.

C. WE ASSUME THIS QUESTION MEANS TRIBAL GROUPS AND
INDIGENOUS VIETNAMESE AND CHINESE. WE ARE NOT AWARE OF
SUCH CONTACTS.

D. WE KNOW OF NONE.

E. THE CHINESE SAY THE SAME NASTY THINGS ABOUT THE
SOVIETS HERE THAT THEY DO ELSEWHERE. THEY ALSO HAVE AN
ACTIVE AID PROGRAM GOING AND CHINESE "EXPERTS" ARRIVE
FROM TIME TO TIME. WE ARE NOT ABLE TO ADVISE AS TO
THEIR EXACT NUMBERS BUT THE OFFICIAL CHINESE PRESENCE
HERE HAS BEEN EXPANDED IN RECENT MONTHS AND THEY ARE
RENTING MORE HOUSES THAN THEY DID PREVIOUSLY. UNLIKE
THE RUSSIANS, THEY DO NOT STAND OUT IN A CROWD NOR DO
THEY MINGLE OR SOCIALIZE, BUT LAREGELY STAY TO THEM-
SELVES.

F. ONE CAN ONLY GUESS AS TO THE ATTITUDE OF THE
DRV. DID THEY ASK THE SOVIETS OR DID THE SOVIETS ASK
THEM? IN ANY CASE, IT APPEARS TO US THAT SOVIET AND
DRV INTERESTS ARE PARALLEL IN THIS INSTANCE. THE DRV
PRESUMABLY WISHES LAOS TO BE ASSISTED BUT IS NOT REALLY
ABLE TO DO MUCH ITSELF. THE SOVIETS ARE NOT REALLY
RIVALS OF THE DRV FOR HEGEMONY IN LAOS. THE CHINESE,
HOWEVER, ARE. THEREFORE, IT BEHOOVES HANOI TO EN-
COURAGE MOSCOW TO ASSIST LAOS BOTH BECAUSE LAOS NEEDS
THE ASSISTANCE AND AS A COUNTERWEIGHT TO CHINESE
INFLUENCE. THE SOVIETS PRESUMABLY WANT TO GIVE SUCH
ASSISTANCE BECAUSE: 1) LAOS IS A COMMUNIST STATE AND
IT WISHES TO EXPAND ITS AREA OF INFLUENCE; 2) BY DOING
SO THEY AID VIET-NAM IN LIMITING CHINESE INFLUENCE, AND
3) IT'S THE ONLY REAL ACTION MOSCOW HAS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA.

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G. THUS FAR EVERYONE IS VERY CIVIL AND ONE ASSUMES
THAT THE VIETNAMESE WILL TRY TO HAVE THE LAO PLAY THE
SAME GAME OF EXPLOITING BOTH COMMUNIST POWERS THAT THEY
THEMSELVES HAVE PLAYED SO WELL FOR SO LONG. IT IS
HARDER TO DO IN PEACETIME, HOWEVER, AND THINGS COULD
BREAK DOWN. IN THE LONGER RUN, WERE THE LAO COMMUNIST
LEADERS TO TRY TO ASSERT THEIR INDEPENDENCE OF VIET-
NAM, ONE WOULD EXPECT THEM TO LOOK TO PEKING, RATHER

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THAN MOSCOW, TO AID THEM IN SUCH AN EFFORT.

H. IT APPEARS TO US THAT MOST SUCH SUPPLIES COME THROUGH THAILAND, BUT IT IS POSSIBLE THAT CONSIDERABLE AMOUNTS ARRIVE IN THE "LIBERATED ZONE" VIA NORTH VIET-NAM. WE YIELD TO BANGKOK ON THE QUESTION OF THE RTG'S AWARENESS OF THE TRANSIT OF SOVIET GOODS ACROSS ITS TERRITORY.

I. PASS TO BANGKOK.

J. POSSIBLY, BUT WE HAVE NO SUPPORTING DATA ON WHICH TO MAKE A DEFINITE REPLY.
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